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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the process of recruiting high quality liberal arts graduates into teacher preparation programs at Memphis State University, Tennessee. The two graduate programs, the Master of Arts in Teaching and the Lyndhurst, both require full-time attendance, have lock-step delivery systems and extended internships, and are intensive. In describing recruitment strategies, it is pointed out that the target group formed a disparate population not easily reached by a single approach. The primary approach used to reach these individuals was advertising through newspapers and public service announcements on radio and television. Word of mouth was encouraged and appeared to be effective. Personal contact was the second stage of the recruiting process. The selection process involved transcript evaluation, program orientation, screening procedures, and commitments. A profile is presented describing the credentials of the graduate students finally selected for the two programs. Suggestions are made for using incentives in recruiting students and for increasing the applicant pool of talented potential teachers. (JD)

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Recruiting High Quality Students Through a Fifth Year Program: It Can Be Done

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Recruiting High Quality Students
Through a Fifth Year Program:
It Can Be Done

Recruitment of new inductees for the teaching profession has been an issue of concern and debate during the last phase of the education reform movement. Emerging as the focal point of this debate have been the twin issues of quality and quantity. The initial debate focused on the issue of quality of new teachers and prospective teacher candidates. More recently the quantity issue has gained serious attention primarily because of the persistent reports of a pending imbalance between supply and demand.

The early proponents of reform, concerned with the quality issue, have now adopted the quantity issue. This group argues that both issues can be solved if admission to teacher preparation programs can be made more attractive to baccalaureate holders, old and new, who have a latent desire to teach. Exactly what constitutes attractive admission is seldom described.

Three years ago the Memphis State University College of Education began a watershed reform in its initial teacher certification program...moving to a graduate level preparation for for secondary areas and establishing time lines for programs in in early childhood, elementary and special education. Two years ago, as part of the Tennessee reform program, the College was granted funding for a Center of Excellence in Teacher Education. Simultaneously, a private foundation entered into a collaborative arrangement with Memphis State, the University of Tennessee,

Knoxville and the State Department of Education to develop and implement a fast tract preparation program for academically talented graduates with liberal arts majors. This serendipity led to a decision to launch two graduate teacher education programs for secondary education .

Since all of the enrollees in these two programs had to be externally recruited, we had the opportunity to test some of the hypotheses that had been espoused about attracting high quality liberal arts graduates into teacher preparation programs.

This paper will address several of the issues encountered and the results of our efforts to recruit these candidates. Special attention is given to (1) the recruitment process, (2) the selection process, (3) the academic credentials of candidates, (4) and reflections on our experiences.

The two graduate programs were a newly conceptualized Master of Arts in Teaching and the Lyndhurst. Both programs require full time attendance, have lock step delivery systems, have extended internships and are intensive. The MAT Program is 15 months in length, provides a degree and certification, consists of 45 hours of credit, and has a three phased internship. The Lyndhurst Program is 12 months long, provides for certification only, consists of 28 hours of credit, and has a one placement internship.

Active recruitment was a new game with few rules or experiences available to provide guidance. However, several questions were immediately identified. These were: (1) Who are these people who purportedly are eager to enter the teaching

profession? (2) What kinds of front end information do they need? (3) How can information regarding the programs best be communicated to them? (4) What kinds of realistic time lines need to be established to conduct recruitment and selection? (5) What expenses will be involved in recruiting? In terms of the target groups, our experiences have helped us identify five rather distinct target groups. These are 1) the degreed homemaker who wants to join the professional labor force 2) the second career and career change individual, 3) the new baccalaureate holder now confronted with the issue of the the utility of the degree, 4) the underemployed who finds current employment not sufficiently challenging, and 5) the floater, that is, the person who is still seeking a niche in life. These individuals form a very disparate population, and a population that is not easily accessible in terms of communicating with by a single approach.

Recruitment Strategies

Advertising

Commercial newspaper advertising is the primary approach. Two advertisements are run in the local metropolitan newspaper. This gives us a circulation of approximately 370,000 and a potential readership of nearly 1,000,000. Additional newspaper advertising is purchased in small local newspapers that serve geographic areas and a readership that supplements the metropolitan newspaper. The soon-to-be new college graduate population is also targeted through paid advertising in various college newspapers.

Public service announcements prepared for radio and

television are used. These announcements are free and are aired at the discretion of the various stations. However, even though they are seldom aired during prime time, they help reach individuals who have unusual working hours or a daily routine that is atypical. These PSAs are given to the network commercial stations as well as to the smaller stations, such as those operated by schools and colleges. Currently PSAs are run on 37 radio stations and seven television stations.

Word of mouth has become increasingly important as the programs gain stature, longevity and publicity. Major contributors are representatives of the College and University, both for their personal referrals and for conversations with others who then relay this information. Another source of referral are individuals employed in other higher education institutions, particularly those smaller institutions who produce quality liberal arts graduates but who do not have graduate level programs for certification. School district representatives are gaining in importance. They refer individuals who do not have certification, but who express an interest in teaching. Graduates from the first cycle and participants in the present cycle recommend potential candidates.

The key to advertising is to get the information in front of the public. The information itself needs to adhere to basic guidelines for effective advertising. It needs to attract attention, spark interest and arouse curiosity to the degree that interested individuals make the follow-up contact. It is also important to remember that the potential recruit does not have to

be the individual who actually reads or hears the advertising. Making contact with individuals who serve as "significant others" in the lives of people are equally important, perhaps even more so. All advertising carries phone numbers and addresses if more information is desired.

Personal Contact

Personal contact is usually the second stage of the recruiting process. Two professional level people serve as contacts. They provide information regarding the programs and selection procedures. Most of the inquiries relate to eligibility requirements, program structure, expectations of participants, types of incentives and assistance available and selection procedures and time lines. If, after the initial contact, the inquirer remains interested, an application and descriptive program information is mailed.

The initial conversation is an important screening point. Enough information is solicited and provided to make a reasonable determination if the inquirer has the appropriate background and the possibility to handle the personal life rearrangements that are required of most participants.

The entire recruiting process is lengthy. The programs start in June. Initial announcements are made in mid-December. A second advertising blitz occurs in mid-January. Final selections are made in April. The most hectic times occur during the screening and selection phase. The details of this phase of the process are described in the next section.

Selection Process

Interested persons must submit an application to the College of Education. An applicant portfolio is established. This portfolio contains the following information: recommendations, official college transcript(s), completed application form, confirmation of admission to graduate school, including appropriate graduate school admission scores on either the MAT or GRE, interview ratings and writing sample evaluations.

The selection process involves several steps. These are transcript evaluation, program orientation, screening procedures and commitments.

Transcript Evaluation

Official transcripts are evaluated by the COE certification office to determine applicants academic qualifications. Attention is given to the quality of academic performance, the breadth and depth of the program of studies, and the identification of all potential certification areas. Applicants who are certified or eligible for certification are not considered. They are referred to other program areas. Applicants who do not meet the requirements for certification for the subject areas are counselled about other options.

Program Orientation

Applicants who are successfully screened through the transcript evaluation are invited to campus for a program orientation meeting. This session serves three purposes. One, the two programs are reviewed. Included in this review are the following: our expectations of participants, a review of the

program of studies, types of incentives, selection procedures and time lines. Each applicant must also attend a question and answer session. A second purpose is the collection of a writing sample. These writing samples are independently evaluated by two COE professors. Third, each applicant undergoes a structured interview that is conducted by two COE faculty. Their evaluations are made independently.

Evaluation and Selection Committees

The final responsibility for selecting the candidate pool rests with the evaluation and selection committees. All of the portfolio information is made available to these committees. The selection committee composition and procedures differ for the two programs. Therefore, they are described separately.

M. A. T.

The screening committee for the M. A. T. Program is comprised of the Dean, the Director of the Center of Excellence, the program coordinator, the Director, Office of Professional Laboratory Experiences and the Coordinator of Student Services. Individually they review the applicant portfolios and rank the applicants. Since the program has limited enrollments, evaluations and rankings are made across and within subject areas. When needed, input is solicited from academic departments regarding the quality of an applicant's program of studies. Applicants that do not meet the admission requirements or selected for the pool are informed.

Lyndhurst Program

The Lyndhurst Program admissions process is more complicated. Final admission is contingent upon a cooperating

school district selecting the applicant for a half time teaching position. Therefore, selection is done in two stages. The first stage is similar to that done with the M. A. T. Program. The purpose of this stage is to identify applicants that Memphis State University is willing to accept as candidates. The second stage of screening involves a careful review by a screening board that represents several groups. This group, working in small committees, reviews all of the applicants and rates each applicant in terms of acceptability for the program. Any applicant that receives a negative rating is reviewed by another committee. Applicants who survive this screening comprise the applicant pool from which the cooperating school districts make their selections.

Those who do not survive the screening are notified of their status. The composition of the screening board includes the following: Dean, College of Education; Dean, College of Arts and Sciences; Director, Office of Teacher Certification, Tennessee; local school superintendent representatives; professors, College of Education and College of Arts and Sciences; representatives of personnel offices from the local school districts; teachers; and MSU Lyndhurst Program representatives.

Commitments

Securing commitments is the last step of the process. M.A.T. candidates are sent a letter informing them that they have been selected. They are informed of which incentives are being offered. They are asked to sign and return a letter of intent to enter the program.

Candidates in the Lyndhurst Program are informed that they are included in the selection pool from which school districts will make their choices. After the school district personnel officials make their selections, each candidate is called and informed of their selection. If candidates choose not to accept the appointment, they are removed from the pool. Applicants are not given a choice of districts; they are only allowed to accept or decline an appointment.

Applicants in both selection pools that are not chosen are informed. They are encouraged to reapply or to pursue other options to gain teacher certification.

Credentials

During the first two cycles of recruitment and selection, over 700 persons from more than fifteen states requested information about and applications for the Graduate Teacher Education Programs. Approximatley one-third of the inquirers formally applied for admission and 36% of the applicants were selected.

The selection process was implemented to evaluate academic strengths, interpersonal skills and commitment to the teaching profession in order to identify the best of the talented. As a result, 31 candidates were awarded Fellowships for the 1985-86 cycle; 50 Fellows were selected in 1986-87.

The following profile describes the credentials of the total group, Lyndhurst and the Master of Arts in Teaching candidates for both cycles.

The 90 Fellows selected, 59 females and 31 males, represented the states of Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Kentucky. One-tenth of the participants are minority students. Ages range from 21 to 59 years with an average age of 32.

The Miller Analogies Test (MAT) or the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is required for admission to Memphis State University. The average score of the participants for the MAT is 56.5; the average GRE score, 1172.

Seventy-five Fellows had a bachelors degree only; 14 participants held a masters degree; 1 selectee has earned as doctorate. These degrees represent 45 institutions of higher learning. The undergraduate cumulative grade point averages, as well as, the GPA in the teaching endorsement areas, exceed 3.0

Approximately one-fourth of the total group earned degrees in the area of social studies; 21% majored in English and one-fifth in natural science. Twelve percent are certifiable in mathematics and the remainder of the group represent the areas of foreign languages, business education, art education, music education and vocational home economics. Most participants meet or exceed the State of Tennessee requirements in several endorsement areas or can within the context of the program earn an additional endorsement if there is a deficiency of only five to six credit hours.

During the final semester of the teacher preparation programs, the Core Battery of the National Teacher Examinations is taken by the participants in the Graduate Teacher Preparation

programs as well as by undergraduate students who are completing secondary education programs under the requirements of earlier catalogs. Through the Center of Excellence, a preliminary study was conducted to compare the performance of the first cycle of Lyndhurst, MAT, and undergraduate secondary education majors on the NTE Core Battery. It was found that the performance level of the Lyndhurst and MAT fellows ranged 22-32 percentile points higher on all of the Core Battery scales. Further study will include a comparison of the 1986-87 fellows and secondary education graduates. However, the preliminary study suggests that the Memphis State graduate teacher preparation programs have attracted higher ability candidates.

Perspectives and Reflections

(1) There are considerable numbers of baccalaureate holders with attractive academic credentials who apparently desire to teach. They represent most of the academic areas. However, mathematics and foreign language appear to be underrepresented. Social sciences and English appear to be overrepresented. The sciences vary according to specific discipline; however, there appears to be several applicants with broad backgrounds in the sciences.

(2) Transcript evaluation is an important step. Quality of major varies drastically from one institution to another. Also many applicants have certification areas supplement their major. Quality of academic performance varies widely, and in many cases, individuals will be strong in one area but weak in another. Grade

point average needs to checked carefully. Allowances may need to be made for candidates who completed undergraduate degrees several years ago. Grade inflation must be taken into consideration.

(3) A profile approach to evaluating individuals is highly recommended. The personal interview is a must. Potential success as a teacher involves several criteria. Different data sources need to be included as part of the portfolio. The informal networking that occurs when dealing with "home grown" products does not operate effectively when you are recruiting externally. Read recommendations with caution and insight. Look for what is not being said as well as what is being said. Look for skeletons...they are easier to handle as front end issues.

(4) Stated desire to teach as indicated by application for a program does not mean that this decision is based on realistic information. Floaters, in particular, need to be carefully reviewed. Career change candidates need to be probed to determine why they want to become teachers. The more attractive the incentive, the more likely that you will attract applicants with ulterior motivations.

(5) Incentives appear to be a major attraction. Immediate and direct financial assistance is the most attractive. Delayed benefits are helpful and ought to be stressed.

(6) Minority applicants are underrepresented. Extra special efforts will probably need to made in order to identify and recruit these candidates.

Conclusion

Based on two complete cycles of recruiting and the near completion of a third cycle, we believe that the base for attracting candidates into teaching can be broadened. Incentives appear to be a major factor. Our incentives include financial assistance, compressed time to complete a program, and opportunities to enter the Tennessee Career Ladder with both a masters degree and as an Apprentice Teacher rather than as a Probationary Teacher.

While the applicant pool can be increased by external recruiting, this recruiting and subsequent screening must be done carefully. Over 50 percent of our applicants are truly not viable candidates. Others, though their academic records are solid, have attributes that make them relatively unattractive to the profession. The informal networking and screening that typically occurs with "home grown" students does not exist when you recruit externally.

Programs that are designed to attract others into the profession need to be implemented. However, they must be controlled programs in that the quality dimensions must be carefully monitored. These programs, particularly the recruiting and screening, are time consuming and relatively expensive. These factors need to be built into a program design.